

Aging and Independence Services, County of San Diego, California

Aging and Independence Services, County of San Diego (AIS) programs are marketed as a direct wellness campaign. Efforts are combined with promotional materials on physical fitness and nutrition education. These programs target many low income, culturally diverse populations at the Senior Nutrition sites and participants in the Feeling Fit Club programs.

Aging and Independence Services created a unique wellness program called the Feeling Fit Club in June 1999, primarily intended for sedentary, at-risk older adults of various ethnicities and cultures, who participate in the nutrition programs. By partnering with senior nutrition sites, Feeling Fit Clubs were designed to be part of a comprehensive program addressing nutrition, exercise, and socialization components of wellness. Because AIS serves 13,000 seniors and 840,000 meals per year through its nutrition program, linking the Feeling Fit Club to these sites provided a tremendous opportunity to enhance this system as well as the seniors served through the additional components of a total wellness program. The aspect of keeping people nutritionally healthy was in place, and although the opportunity to be socially engaged was also occurring, the Feeling Fit Clubs were designed specifically to build upon these features.

The *Feeling Fit Clubs* incorporate a series of wellness workshops at each of the sites (including osteoporosis education, fall prevention program, nutrition education) that provide the educational component to encourage a commitment to healthy lifestyles in an effort to reduce participant's health risks. Instructors also routinely engage participants in regular mental workouts by leading the class through varied exercise routines, discussing current events, daily routines, and providing information on related health issues.

San Diego County provides adults with a weekly five-minute series of nutrition education on the local County Television Network (CTN) following the fifty-five minute Feeling Fit Club program. The series includes five different nutrition education topics. All callers are offered a chance to call the toll free 1-800-510-2020 number to receive educational information. To date they have received over 600 callers for this information.

A Registered Dietitian and Registered Diet Technician have been providing nutrition education programs. Nutrition staff have found that up-to-date, current information gets the best response from the seniors and that food tasting (soy presentation), cooking demonstrations and recipes are still a big hit. From July through December, 2004, the county provided 60 nutrition education sessions to 1,768 seniors.

One of the goals of the *Feeling Fit Club* is to increase the number of older adults in San Diego County who maintain and improve their physical stamina as a result of regular physical exercise. The program hopes there will also be a reduction in institutionalizations from falls and other avoidable injuries.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the *Feeling Fit Club* is its accessibility to everyone. The program has physical sites and is virtually in every nook and cranny through the CTN cable show offered in all major geographic areas of the county. Additionally, participation is free and all equipment is provided at every center. *Feeling Fit Club* specifically targets low income, culturally diverse, geographic areas where seniors generally have not had the opportunity or exposure to these types of programs. As a result, the *Feeling Fit Club* includes a high percentage of ethnically and culturally diverse older adults. The program tries to incorporate the music familiar to the specific ethnic group and even if there is a language barrier, the universal language of a genuine smile, consistency, and demonstration of the exercise overcame any communication problems. Yet one of the most interesting results of this program has been the fact that everyone wants to be healthy, happy, and independent – which transcends all cultural barriers.

From an overall perspective, the customer satisfaction is apparent in the total number of participants and classes held each month. The *Feeling Fit Club* currently has more than 200 classes with more than 550 participants each month. With the AIS and *Feeling Fit Club* motto of “Successful Aging: To keep people physically active, mentally stimulated, nutritionally healthy, and socially engaged,” the success of this program has exceeded our expectations in all aspects and is a direct result of incorporating each of the partnership components.

The *Feeling Fit Club* program was designed as a complete community team approach that was established from inception. The partnership of this program is a joint effort involving AIS, which serves as the organizing body; the senior nutrition sites, senior centers, and senior residences/living facilities which serve as the host sites for the classes. San Diego State University's (SDSU) Older Adult Fitness Program provides the exercise physiologist instructors/interns, as well as the research/assessment component, the guidelines for instructor training, and overall exercise expertise. The local community colleges provide programs provide qualified instructors.

An important component of the *Feeling Fit Club* is undoubtedly the partnership with County Television Network. The consistent airing of the classes on cable television throughout the county has not only provided those unable to attend personally to still participate, but has also generated awareness of the program that has resulted in increased attendance at all the sites. *Feeling Fit Club* partnered with CTN to produce five, one-hour television shows which air Monday through Friday on each cable network throughout the county. This show also incorporates a nutrition component to address similar educational issues discussed at the "live" *Feeling Fit Club* classes within the nutrition centers. The show offers free educational materials including a 5 A Day brochure and an older adult food guide pyramid. The program receives an average of 30 calls per week requesting nutrition education materials and fitness information.

The seniors are part of the team, as are the dedicated instructors, who are passionately committed to this program and to improving the quality of life for their senior students. The day-to-day logistics are carefully coordinated through the AIS Health Promotions

division, which oversees all aspects of the *Feeling Fit Club* program. Although each organization has its individual goal, AIS is responsible for orchestrating all aspects of the program with the appropriate partner to ensure the smooth operation of the *Feeling Fit Club*.

The *Feeling Fit Club* research conducted by San Diego State University in 2001 reported that the project targeted seniors who, based upon pilot measurements, were mildly to moderately frail, still living independently, but at high risk for loss of independence based on functional status measurements. The average age of our pilot participants was 78 years; 76percent were women and 42 percent reported living alone. Individual participants were diverse in terms of ethnicity (approximately 53 percent Caucasian, 26percent Hispanic, with Filipino, Asian and African-Americans making up most of the remaining participants), and were predominantly of lower socioeconomic status (SES), based on County data reported in 1999, which showed that the median monthly income of those over 65 years was \$1,400, with 31 percent of respondents reporting less than \$1,000/month. This program is unique in that it reaches a population that has had little opportunity to participate in a nutrition, fitness and fall prevention program such as this.

A class evaluation tool was developed and implemented at each site. Many of the participants say they experience the following: better balance, fewer falls, increased strength, better sleep, improved mood, better digestion, relief of arthritis symptoms, and more resistance to chronic illnesses. Research indicates the inability to perform ADLs is directly related to muscular weakness, balance deficits, loss of range of motion, or joint flexibility, and an overall deterioration in functional fitness.

As part of this research, a battery of eight measures of functional fitness was selected to evaluate the program's effectiveness for improving balance and physical functional status of participants. These measures were selected because of their relevance as measures of independent living, their feasibility for use in community studies, and their favorable psychometric properties. Several measures (chair rise, arm curl, eight foot up-and-go, chair sit-and-reach, back scratch, and Two-minute step test) were part of a functional fitness test for community dwelling older adults developed by Rikli and Jones of Cal State Fullerton, while the other two are measures of static (1-foot stance) and dynamic balance (wall reach). Pre-training scores were between 10th and 25th percentile on all measures indicating poor baseline functional fitness. Results after 12 weeks were as follows: low back/hip range of motion 61 percent increase; static balance 27 percent increase; aerobic endurance 24 percent increase, upper arm strength 20 percent increase; lower leg strength six percent increase.

The opportunity to replicate the Feeling Fit Clubs in other geographic settings has tremendous potential due to the fact that the community partnerships established here are also available in other markets. The key component is to have the lead support from the organizing body, as in the AIS Health Promotions division utilized with this program. The Community College and Adult Schools offer their services in other markets and Universities are always interested in partnering with local groups for research opportunities with their students.

The *Feeling Fit Club* also provides extensive opportunities within the Aging Network to collaborate on achieving common goals that will improve the quality of life for seniors in any community. It is because of this ongoing collaboration and strong community partnerships that the *Feeling Fit Club* will continue to be successful.

With regards to obstacles overcome, initially there was some apprehension about establishing a program targeting the unmotivated, inactive older adult to participate in an exercise program. Additionally there was concern about how the program would be received among the various cultures and ethnicities that make up the AIS senior nutrition program. However, through careful planning, a fun, safe, effective program addressing the fitness needs of this population became a success.

In an effort to address the seniors' anticipated health and safety concerns and liability issues, the *Feeling Fit Club* was designed to incorporate a health questionnaire to establish participants' existing conditions, as well as a doctor's waiver. It is essential to have the on-site nutrition director supportive and involved in the program to ensure that participants are encouraged to attend the class. The nutrition director is also available to discuss any concerns or issues interested with older adults.

Finding and maintaining qualified instructors continues to be, an ongoing challenge. However, by partnering with the university as well as the community colleges and adult education programs offers access to potential additional instructors. AIS and SDSU partner in providing trainings for *Feeling Fit Club* instructors, as well as refresher trainings for existing team members.

Providing a free program like the Feeling Fit Clubs is possible because of a variety of funding sources. There are a number of partnerships established that have each provided an essential component to this program – the Active Aging Community Task Force (AACTF) Project, California Osteoporosis Prevention & Education (COPE), and Bravo Foundation.

Aging & Independences Services has committed their own resources and staff with a dedication to the success of the program. The organization has contracted out services to an exercise physiologist for guidance and quality control and we work closely with our current nutrition consultant. It is because of this ongoing collaboration and strong community partnerships that have been established from inception that the *Feeling Fit Club* will continue to be successful.